

Tularemia

What is tularemia?

Tularemia, also known as “rabbit fever”, is a bacterial disease that can affect both animals and humans. It is most commonly found in animals such as rabbits, rodents, and squirrels. It can also infect domestic animals such as cats or sheep.

Who can get tularemia?

Tularemia occurs naturally in the United States. Most cases occur in the south-central and western states. Nearly all cases occur in rural areas. There are typically about 150 cases of tularemia reported each year in the United States.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 5 days after exposure to the bacteria, but can take as long as 14 days.

Signs and symptoms of tularemia can depend on how a person is exposed to the bacteria. Possible symptoms include skin ulcers, swollen and painful lymph glands, inflamed eyes, sore throat, mouth sores, diarrhea, or pneumonia.

If the bacteria are inhaled, symptoms may include sudden fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough, and progressive weakness. People with pneumonia can develop chest pain, difficulty breathing, bloody sputum, and respiratory failure.

How is tularemia spread?

Tularemia is most commonly spread by being bitten by an infected tick, deerfly, or other insect, handling infected animal carcasses, eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or breathing in the bacteria. Inhalation of tularemia can occur during farming or landscaping activities. Outbreaks of tularemia have occurred among hamsters purchased from pet stores in the U.S. Tularemia is not known to be spread from person to person.

What is the treatment for tularemia?

Tularemia is treated by taking antibiotics for 10 to 21 days. If not treated properly, tularemia can occasionally be fatal.

How can tularemia be prevented?

To prevent the spread to tularemia, rubber gloves should be worn when skinning or handling animals, especially rabbits. Meat from wild game should be cooked thoroughly before eating. Avoid bites from flies and ticks by wearing protective clothing and insect repellents. Check for ticks frequently. Avoid drinking untreated water. Instruct children not to handle any sick or dead animals. Consider wearing a dust mask when mowing or landscaping and do not mow over dead animals.

Can tularemia be used as a bioweapon?

The bacteria that cause tularemia are highly infectious. Also, a small number of bacteria (10-50 organisms) can cause disease. If used as a weapon, it would most likely be made airborne for exposure by inhalation. People who inhale the bacteria could experience severe respiratory illness, including pneumonia and systemic infection, if they are not treated.

How do I get more information on tularemia?

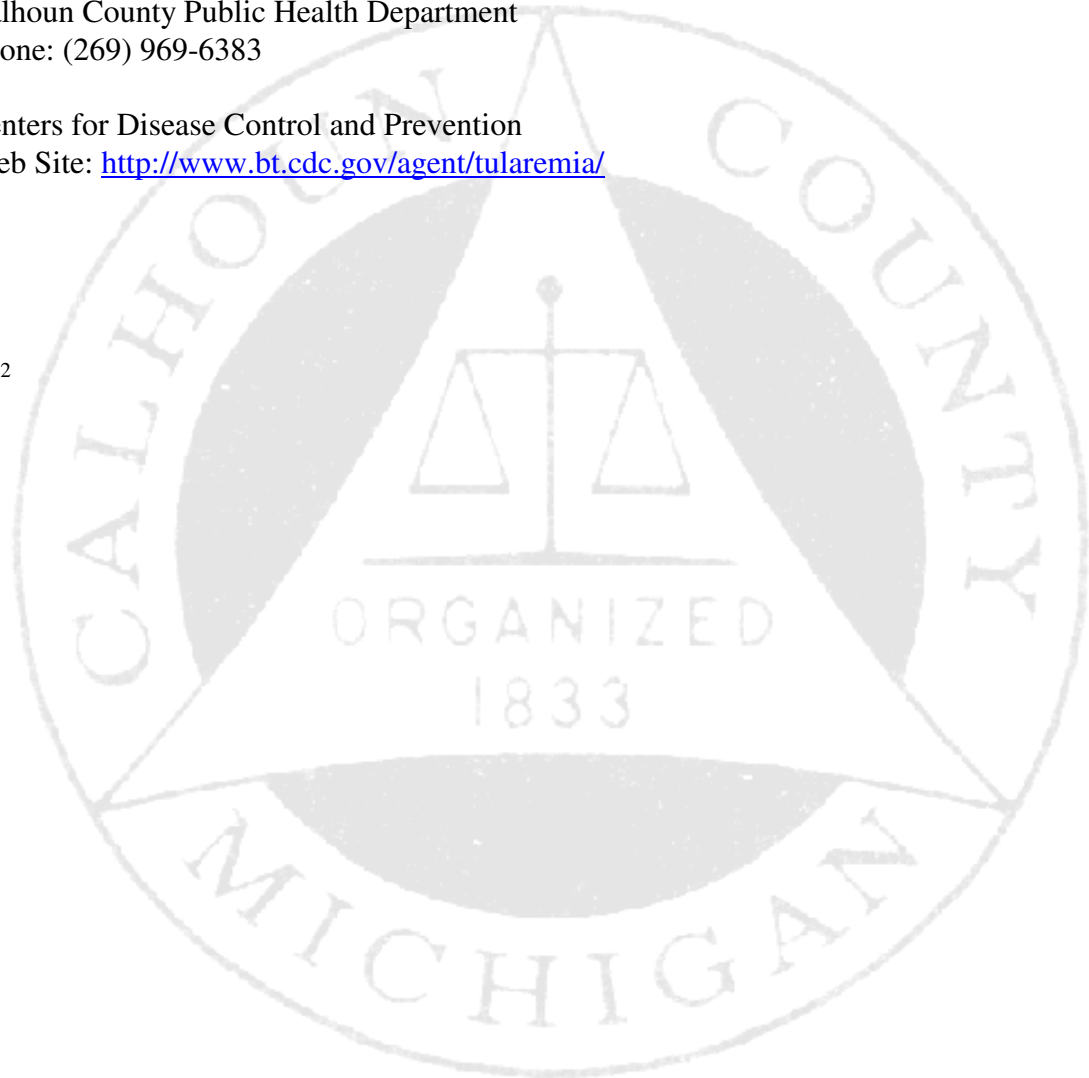
Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web Site: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/tularemia/>

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

Calhoun County Public Health Department

190 E. Michigan Avenue, Suite A100

Battle Creek, Michigan 49014

Tel: (269) 969-6383

Fax: (269) 969-6488